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**The endemic theatricality of segregated groups.
The anatomy of the collective and the psychology of the common
body**

Doctoral thesis summary

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Keywords: *Endemism, theatricality, segregation effects, role conflict, group poetics, preferred space, latent histrionics, social bodies, hierarchies, collective body, identity representations, gender discrimination, non-binary, imagery of illness, gestures, micro-theatricality, harmful theatricality, leader, contemporary ritual, carnival, community spirit, oppressed group, participation effect, warrior imaginary, punitive imaginary, post-racial era, race performance, homo fignens, post-truth era, online theatricality and directorial functions.*

Main Ideas

Our research focuses on an in-depth look on societies with small-scale precise hierarchies, in order to detect genuine elements of theatricality and to spot the social and artistic value and positive contamination through various ways of intra-community coagulation. We *sink in* these mosaic conglutinations through epistemological and anthropological discoveries, specifically into what is meant by *group* and *endemic theatricality*. The discovery of functional channels within segregated groups will reveal new tracks for theatre creators working on their craft – more focused on approaches with communitarian effects – by deciphering their semiotic contents. We consider that segregation is a primary catalyst of theatrical potential within a group and we’ll analyse it fractally, drawing on “practice as research” elements.

In this paper we’ll be focusing on the relationship between *the group* and *the collective imaginary*, highlighting its representative function and the inter-human energies released in a hierarchical society. The tools we draw on in our argumentation are primarily based on interviews, surveys, interdisciplinary research, and an analysis of group diversity with an objective perspective. The theories we support, also verified in stage practice, are built on disparate arguments spread across various chapters. The chapters of the thesis answer their own questions, the overall demonstration being built in concentric circles, not on a pyramidal structure.

In addition to the main demonstration, which supports the theatricality of sexual, racial and religious segregation, we analyse in our thesis other (secondary) factors isolated specifically. We are interested in analysing the roles of individuals within groups and the structures of these multiple entities. We are not interested in uniformising masses, but small, hierarchical groups, full of specific differences and also polymorphously highlighted. In essence, we are developing a plea for an analysis of the collective ambitus. We intuit that here, the main novelty element of the thesis will be found, based on our contribution, but also its topicality. An important part of the paper will focus on the function of group leadership. We also analyse the interactions between different collectives, detecting specific behaviours, but also conflicts between them, taking into account the vulnerability of the questioned structures.

In the introductory chapter we aim to trace the existence of groups in different organisms on the evolutionary scale, speculating on the emergence of latent histrionic activities in them, focusing further on the major distinction between living in or outside the group, opening the way to some redefinitions of the group, useful for our analysis and operational principles through which we structure our research. We have attempted to show that microgroups can be mirrored by specific groupings of other organisms and their gregarious behaviours. This first chapter more precisely outlines our main objectives and the ground on which we will specifically operate in the following chapters.

In the second chapter we develop the analysis of different types of segregation and the factors that lead to it. When it comes to focusing on minorities sexually, racially, ethnically segregated (or by age), the role-play becomes an ever-expanding universe. The remaining impact of the practice of segregation is precipitated in the consciousness of the relationship between the individual and history, but also in the relativity of his or her belonging to a group, creating new affective geographies worthy of being sources for the theatrical vein. The theatre will not survive without a new mythography. In its reconstruction, we can start by defining the factors of segregation, which we have tried to present in this chapter, identifying some social ruptures and trouble spots. We have also tried to add critical references of maximum legitimacy.

Further on, we also analysed the feminist critique of the groups that this current arouses, migrating towards a non-binary hermeneutic. We have also scanned those social groups, which shape their political positions and influence through their societal expression, all through the prism of exaggerated display of traits, thus using theatricality as a socio-political tool, especially through the examples of the groups Femen and Pussy Riot.

We then entered the desolate territory of illness in the idea of demonstrating that it can be a factor in the coagulation of a social group. We found various metaphors in the *sickened body* – its imagery and the kinds of segregation inherent in illness. Susan Sontag's study of the metaphors of illness has given us a vast territory for analysis, especially of the three examples she examines in particular (tuberculosis, cancer and AIDS). We look at illness from a reforming perspective of theatre, its practices and the idea of community. The conceptual progress of our thesis finds a nodal point in this chapter. It will be taken further by the next chapter, devoted to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this way, we have been able to outline more robust definitions of otherwise difficult to explain reactions, drawing general lines of response in encountering disease. They are, beyond anything, an imbalance. There is, somewhere, an aesthetic play of illness, immersed in undisguised pathos, but also in mad courage. In the face of catastrophism, the group is a form of therapy. Through the pandemic sub-chapter, we spot a group shutdown button and a centripetal function, with regenerative potential. In

the wake of a major global shutdown, concepts such as *remote offices* or new online protocols balance the lack of a real social cohesion factor and bring more attention to the aetiology of this pandemic.

The most extensive chapter, the third, is also the one that exemplifies the most relevant codes and rituals that can be linked to the group and the endemic theatricality. In its first sub-chapter, we began with an extensive excursion into the area of gesture and mimicry. In this extensive sub-chapter, the cornerstone of the whole of chapter 3, we begin with various attempts to define taste. We have done so because it dominates facets of contemporary social life, but also because it defines the aesthetic choices of certain groups. We then turned, through several examples, to the analysis of gesture and mimicry, starting from the idea that these two are the foundations of theatrical expression and obvious marks of the endemic theatricality of groups. As constitutive elements of ritual, gesticulation and mimicry require a significant research, references to them appearing in the other chapters as well, being a binding element of the whole analytical structure of this thesis. We have evaluated various situations, events and key moments related to gestures as marks of transactions, focusing on some major gestures.

We then entered the field of militant behaviours (exemplified on a previous level of analysis) and connected them to the analysis of gestures. Our reflections turned to the case studies of totalitarian systems (with the example of North Korea), marking the gesture as a sad panegyric. The function of leadership, recursively analysed in several chapters, was also part of the exposition of cumulative ideas in the present sub-chapter. As a kind of counterpoint, we found in laughter a paradoxical theatrical manifestation in relation to totalitarian regimes.

Next, we *bookmarked* the detailed exegesis of the costume from a representational perspective. We understand how it defines some populations by marking their codes. The costume has its novel role in our practice, being linked to the sense of coding. Moreover, going further with our analysis of segregated groups, the quality of distinction it confers in the search for traces of endemism has proved to be of utmost importance. The costume defines the groups, whether it is an uniform or some extension of role play. We have devoted a greater extent to it than we did to the space (which I have analysed sporadically, over several chapters), taking into account its insufficient analysis in the performing arts environment in our country.

Here, the concepts we operated with came from the fashion world and my own expertise working directly on stage. In our opinion, as a major element of grouping, camouflage and protection, but also a number one theatrically weapon, the costume is less credited than the set in the theatrical arts. A special case was the armour (fortified body), and another was the nudity (as a counterpoint metaphorical zone). Towards the end, our collaborative practice through meeting Lucian Broscăţean has enriched the research. As a limitation of our research, we detect the vastness of this field, of which we have touched only a small area.

In our theatrical excursus, the central element of the third chapter is the analysis of rituals. The boiling point of the ritual is the sphere of culturally conditioned social reactions. How does the urban man manage not to completely lose touch with the ritual? Repeating rituals or inventing new ones are exemplary gestures. Using the biological toolkit announced at the beginning of this thesis, we believe that, throughout the evolution of the human species, the ritual has been a form of agglutination of the first order. From the convulsions of the ritual, everyday behaviours, taboos and pure mimesis were born. Cosmological schemes and ritual scripts are part of the anamnesis of any kind of foundation, and this thesis aims to initiate a better dialogue with groups, in which traces of endemic theatricality abound.

We have schematically entered into the area of algorithms of religious groups, and then into ceremonies with strict rules. I felt that the performance, so specific to the theatre, is on these grounds linked to native histrionics. The ritual shapes the collective time. Notorious examples, but also some specific ones, with a focus on live pageantry and pilgrimages shaped the research part of the examples. We conclude our excursus in this sub-chapter with an overview of sport and its quasi-religious considerations.

In the most exotic of chapters, we have described the Rio Carnival in detail from the perspective of its exacerbated but short-lived theatricality. Moreover, we have analysed our own contact with one of the largest events of its kind in Europe, the Feria de Sevilla, pointing out its numerous *clausus* aspect. We have noted the techniques of amplification and hypertrophy in these two macro-manifestations, but we have also highlighted the groups that subsume them and the diverse types of inter-group and interpersonal interaction they elicit. Their hermeneutics touched on the analysis of the camp phenomenon, regional and entic influences; basically, the temporary migrations caused by the two events, etc.

Further on, we entered the area of diversity marches, the PRIDE phenomenon, especially the one in our country, starting with a brief history. Here we talked about the community, the conflict with opposing groups, slippages and statistics, emphasizing the theatricality aspect. We tried to draw some comparisons at the end of the research, highlighting the hedonistic excesses in both types of experiences, leaving the area of diffusion between carnivalesque and militant experiences open.

In the last sub-chapter, a corollary of the third chapter, we decided to investigate the potentially theatrical manifestations of war and the special tactics and the vast imaginary it arouses. We were interested in the segregations that conflagrations provoke and the repercussions on a demographic group. We oscillated throughout the study between Sun Tzu's canonical work and Sebastian Junger's extremely new bestseller (*The Tribe*). Comparatively, we were able to detect significant differences between post-war readjustment to community among tribes and in the Western society. We found that war imbues a novel kind of cultural identity on those who experience it,

marking their existences in many ways. We then delved into an analysis of the military and the discrimination/segregation within it, where we intuited an important role-playing. As a detail, we were interested in the relevance of voice, in the first part on war, namely the ways and contexts in which it functions as a storytelling tool during and after an armed conflict. Further on, we also considered important to analyse the punitive (related) imaginary, the endemic theatricality of prisoners, and our own theatrical experience from our collaboration with the Gherla Maximum Security Penitentiary. Body art is an important source for our study of segregated communities. The codes proposed by prison tattoos, the ritual of tattooing and some of the major gestures of the inmates have been worked out, using also the expertise gained in the previous chapters on ritual, gesture etc.

The fourth chapter is mostly devoted to personal contributions to the formulation of new concepts. Through the most controversial of our studies in this thesis, the one devoted to transrationality, we attempt to approach once more the key theatrical concepts with which one operates in this very new territory. The post-racial era, the metamorphoses of social extremes and the potentially theatrical ambiguity all put us in dialogue with terms such as mimesis, identity, otherness, but from a novel point of view. The identity utopias analysed above, original social constructs, accompanied in the chapter we are concluding by examples from art and society, old and new, highlight the fact that transrationality implies a controversial metamorphosis, which theatre should reflect in original ways. In the context of some of the notorious cases we have highlighted, culminating in Rachel Dolezal's case, we have detected within this paradigm (that of transrationality), marks of homo fingens. The personal contribution of this sub-chapter comes from putting theatrical terminology in dialogue with this subject that is actively revealing itself, even in these moments, on the social stage, potentiating new dramaturgies of the body and the play with the limit.

Because of the lack of sufficient analytical terminology, the need for social contextualisation makes analysis difficult. We have found ways in which the fetishization of race amplifies social cleavages by consulting classic canons on similar topics. In operating a critique of cultural appropriation, we have also noted the danger of atomizing some discourses, but also of analyzing endemism and its deceptive territories. A strong point would also be to exemplify some of the slippages enhanced by biased technology, but also others caused by the tendency to exoticize and the excessive attraction to the hybrid and Dionysian. Certainly, the breed performance has become a hot topic.

We have proposed, for the expanding collective ambitus some new concepts related to a new theatrical practice. We have tried not to fall prey to the abuse of new paradigms, postulating some ideas related to an insufficiently explored theatricality that claims, in the end, the centre of the image. For example, we tried to trace what simulation can still mean in the post-truth era. To this end, we have listed some recycling vectors that we intuit to be valid in theatrical practice and theory

(polymerisation, refinement, etc.), trying to formulate some broad definitions of them, correlated with the lack/need they address. Throughout the fourth chapter, the novelty and the degree of synthesis of some concepts are related to a trans-disciplinary approach, even resorting to a type of semio-pragmatic analysis. All these approaches, with an assumed degree of poeticism, aim to better articulate the new histrionic front, which emphasises a politics of desegregation.

In the last sub-chapter, trying to appeal to what we are directly interested in, namely our own struggle against the fossilization of the art we practice, we have listed a number of potential functions of regalia. Around some leadership skills, we have raised the structure of these vital functions in stage practice. The plethora of (sometimes contrasting) functions that the director possesses (agglutinative, archaeological, structural, introspective, regulative, etc.), by assuming this position, is constantly being added to, like a long list whose end point refuses to appear.

Theoretical caution coupled with neophyte courage and contemporary relativism bring to the forefront the idea of renewing theatre by looking at small communities. The new theatre imposes a new grammar and teaches us an unusually formed theatrical lesson. One could say that it proves to be reformed on the principles of representativeness, much in demand in current artistic discourse. So, we demonstrate native theatricality through an immersion in the real, searching with tools specific to sciences such as anthropology, biology and practice as a research for true spectacular aspects that are related to the endemism of certain groups.

The segregated groups, analysed in detail throughout the chapters, through their surplus of theatricality used as a survival skill, denote a powerful source of revival of our art. In short, we fight for the claim of the centre of the performing arts image by marginal, segregated, minority communities, etc. At the same time, we fight for the cause of their major penetration into the sphere of theatre (our preferred field) beyond the laws of predetermined categories. We are driven by the degree of urgency, the pain points that the artist is meant to reflect in his societal analysis. We let ourselves guided by the hyperactuality of certain subjects and tried to keep an eye on new anthropological, sociological, theatrical theories, etc. We kept, however, close to the canonical authors and their theories, which, to a large extent, we revisited.

We were interested in some laws that have become representative biography for social groups, group interdependence, polymerization systems and group boundaries. Special attention has been paid to leaders and this important function. Moreover, we have paid attention to the strength that members of a group acquire when living in the midst of hostility and the degrees of transfiguration to which they are prone. Our plea for the native traces of theatricality in these social groups is also a betrayal of the environment in which we operate, relying more on segregated communities in which we sense the presence of strong essences.

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